

Political Rapprochement between Yemeni Islah party and Houthi movement in Yemen:

(Analytical study)

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Abstract

This paper aimed to study Political rapprochement between Yemeni Islah Party and Houthi movement, the religious and political background of each has been addressed separately, the relationship between them before and after 2011, addressed the relationship while from conflict to cooperation to conflict, Research question was: To what extent has the political rapprochement between Yemeni Islah Party and Houthi movement affected Yemen's crisis?, The paper concluded with important findings and recommendations mentioned at the end of the paper.

Key Word: *Political Rapprochement, Yemeni Islah Party, Houthi movement, Yemen's crisis.*

Introduction:

Yemen is among the countries that have been experiencing political tension for several years, particularly after the Arab Spring revolts that ravaged many Arab countries, and civil war that erupted in 2015. In this context, some research and press reports indicate a political rapprochement between the Yemeni Islah party and Houthi movement in Yemen.

The relationship between Yemeni Islah party and Houthi movement in Yemen is a controversial topic and Important for understanding Yemen's political and social context, and Political Rapprochement is considered between these two political forces is a topic that attracts the interest of many academic researchers and political analysts, it carries many challenges and impacts on Yemen's current political situation.

This analytical study aims to highlight the importance of studying the political rapprochement between Yemeni Islah Party and Houthi movement in Yemen, Understanding the factors affecting this relationship, Challenges facing and potential effects of this convergence on events in Yemen.

Section one: Religious and Political background

1- Yemeni Islah party (Muslim Brotherhood)

The Yemeni Islah party is a Yemeni political party founded in 1990 and based in the Yemeni capital, Sana'a, this party is the main branch of the Muslim Brotherhood in Yemen, and this gathering differs from most other Arab Islamists, combining tribal elements with the influences of the Muslim Brotherhood and the most militant Salafist groups in Yemen¹.

¹ Amr Hamzawy (2009), “**Between Government and Opposition: The case of the Yemeni Congregation for Reform**”, Carnegie Middle East Center, No.18, Washington, p 3

This party is part of a broad spectrum of Islamic parties and movements in the Arab world that participate in official political action, a unique case, unlike most Islamic parties and movements, Yemeni Islah Party did not enter the political arena as part of the opposition, Rather, began his participation in 1990 as an ally of General People's Congress Party, before it turned against it and becoming the main opposition party by the end of nineties, compared to other Islamic parties and movements operating in the Arab world, this party lacks a clear ideology, a programmed policy, and an ideologically motivated membership system, this party is mostly a traditional party and consists of tribal groups that share a loose commitment to the goals of Islamization of the state and Yemeni society, and to understand this party requires understanding the tribal character of Yemeni society.²

In religious terms, Yemeni Islah Party considers itself to be an Islamic party that adopts the rules of Islamic Sharia in its programs and political goals, the party seeks to promote Islamic values and their implementation in governance and politics, and in political terms, the party lives within the complex Yemeni reality full of political and social conflicts, and affected by regional conflicts in the region and global power wars, especially in recent years with Yemen's civil war and regional ramifications³.

The Yemeni Islah Party was known for supporting the Yemeni revolution that led to the establishment of the republican

² Ibid, p 26

See also:

Laurent Bonnefoy, Marine Poirier(2010) . **The Yemeni Congregation for Reform (al-Islâh): The Difficult Process of Building a Project for Change**. Catusse Myriam, Karam Karam. Returning to political parties?, Lebanese Center for Policy Studies, pp.61-99.

³ عبد الله علي صبري، الإسلاميون والديمقراطية في اليمن: تجربة حزب الإصلاح بين السلطة والمعارضة، مركز رؤية للدراسات، مركز أروقة للدراسات والترجمة والنشر، القاهرة، 2019، ص ص 119-131

regime in Yemen in 1962, and it supports a democratic governance and human rights, and the party completely opposes authoritarian rule and tyranny and seeks to achieve a fair distribution of wealth and social justice.

However, like any other political party, views and attitudes within the reform party can vary according to leadership and members, some members may take different and objective positions on specific religious and political topics, the islah Party aims to realize the aspirations of the Yemeni people for justice, prosperity and the development of the country in line with Islamic religious principles.

2- Houthi movement (Ansar Allah group)

Ansar Allah Group is a political movement with a doctrinal dimension that seeks to build a new intellectual system emanating from ideological bases like other groups of political Islam, it is known as the Houthi movement relative to the actual founder of the movement Hussein Badr Al-Din Al-Houthi, the beginning of Houthi thought dates back to the early 1980s by the Zaidi scholar's hands of Salah Ahmed Fleeta, who founded the Youth Union Association, the stated aim of this movement was to preserve the Zaidi doctrines in front of Salafist tide, which began with the invasion of Yemen in general and Sa 'adah in particular at the time, where Zaidi accounted for the highest proportion of the population, the religious activity of followers of the Zaidi doctrine escalated in response to what they called the Wahhabi invasion⁴.

Initially, it was in the form of a cultural forum that offered awareness-raising lectures, intellectual activities and religious lessons in doctrines, jurisprudence and interpretation, in addition to the teaching of rhetoric and the arts of response, in that period, the

⁴ نبيل البكري، *جماعات الزيدية السياسية: الحوثيون*، موسوعة الحركات الإسلامية في الوطن العربي، ج2، ط1، مركز دراسات الوحدة العربية، بيروت، لبنان، ص 2385

sons of Badr Al-Din Al-Houthi, who were Hussein and Mohammed, were interested in introducing a teaching material on the Iranian Revolution and its principles within the association, in order to admire the Iranian model, Seeking to benefit from this model and employing the philosophy of the Iranian Revolution in line with Yemeni reality, With the establishment of Yemeni unity in 1990,

The Houthis benefited from the new political climate, which allowed for partisan and political pluralism in Yemen, They turned their activities into a political project, An organization called "Al-Shabaab Al-Mu'man" by Hussein Badr Al-Din Al-Houthi, which was based on the remnants of the Youth Union Association, After the resignation of Hussein Badr Al-Din Al-Houthi from the Yemeni parliament in 1997, Attention is paid to educational activities and courses, through lectures and lessons delivered occasionally, At the beginning of the third millennium, the political movement's objectives began to emerge more clearly, Scope expanded its activities in other Yemeni governorates.

The slogans of the political movement appeared, This movement of the Houthis led to a direct clash with Yemeni government agencies in that period, These confrontations resulted in the killing of Hussein Badr Al-Din Al-Houthi in 2004⁵.

Religious background of the Houthis is one of the main reasons for the formation and development of the movement, Houthis believe in Imami Shia and the importance of maintaining the Imami Zaidi ratios, and they wish to regain Zaidi political power and influence in Yemen, Houthis also believe they are defending Shia rights and interests in Yemen in the face of Sunni hegemony⁶.

⁵ جاسم محمد، صناعة الإرهاب والإرهاب السياسي العراق، اليمن، أفغانستان، ط1، دار الياقوت للطباعة والنشر والتوزيع، المملكة الأردنية الهاشمية، 2012، ص 97.
⁶ الجزيرة نت، "جماعة الحوثيين.. حركة يمنية جمعت بين الزيدية والنهج الإيراني والحكم العائلي"، تاريخ الاطلاع 2023/12/15 على الرابط <https://bitly.ws/36Q46>

Politically, Houthi movement views itself as a resistance force to Yemen's government regimes, in particular, the Yemeni Government at that time " National Consensus Government formed after the 2011 Revolution", which the Houthis see as a Sunni Government and serving the interests of foreign Powers, Especially Saudi Arabia and the United States, Houthi movement adopts many political positions against the Yemeni Government's internal and foreign policies, it seeks to control political power in Yemen⁷.

Houthi as a fundamentalist religious group is perhaps the semi-final version of the so-called Zaidi revivalism that has gone through several stages, In the 1980s I was represented by the Youth Stream phase founded by Salah Fleeta, Then the 1990s, which coincided simultaneously with the Al-Haq Party and Al-Shabaab Al-Mu'man Forum⁸.

Section two: Conflict between Yemeni Islah Party and the Houthi movement before and after the 2011 revolution

The Relationship between the Islah Party and the Houthi movement represented a conflict relationship through the party's support for the State wars against the movement from the first war in 2001 to before the 2011 youth revolution, the revolution, known as the 11 February revolution, was the result of being influenced by the then Arab Spring Revolution, where the relationship here began to turn into another direction where one reconciliation brought them together was the overthrow of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh's regime.

⁷مجموعة من الباحثين، الحوثيون_ الحقيقة العسكرية ومصادر الدعم، أوراق سياسية، مركز صناعة الفكر للدراسات والأبحاث، وحدة الدراسات والأبحاث، بيروت، لبنان، 18 مايو 2015، ص 2

⁸نبيل البكري، مرجع سابق ص 2385

Conflict between Houthi and Islah prior to the 2011 revolution was centred on Yemen's power and political balances, Houthi movement was active in areas of northern Yemen and demanded greater political representation and improvement of the economic and social situation of its followers.

Houthi joined the 2011 revolution, whose name was the peaceful youth revolution, they declared their support for it motivated by the principle of exiting the unjust ruler of their Zaidi doctrine, apart from the vendetta motive, perhaps against the regime of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, who fought them for six years⁹.

Their conflict escalated after the overthrow of President Ali Abdullah Saleh in 2011, As relations between them strained, several armed conflicts erupted, exacerbating Yemen's political and security crisis, however, negotiations took place between the Government at the time and the Houthi movement in subsequent years, Led to the signing of the Peace Agreement and national partnership in 2014, however, tensions continued and armed conflicts resurfaced in the following years, ultimately leading to the outbreak of the country's civil war in 2015¹⁰.

After the Yemeni revolution in 2011, many conflicts emerged in Yemen, among them is the conflict between the Houthi movement (Ansar Allah) and Yemeni Islah Party, Conflict began after Yemen's government, backed by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, accused the Houthi group of conspiring against the State and orchestrating violence, shortly after the Houthi group

⁹ Ibid, p 2387
¹⁰ مجلس الأمن، التقرير النهائي لفريق الخبراء المعني باليمن، هيئة الأمم المتحدة، نيويورك، 2017، S/2017/81 على الرابط <https://bitly.ws/UxUW>

stormed the capital Sana'a and took control of it in September 2014¹¹.

The conflict between Houthi movement and the Islah Party was then rife, with Yemen's largest opposition party rejecting Houthi hegemony and embracing anti-Houthi, At the end of 2017, violent clashes took place between the Houthis and supporters of the Islah party in Sana'a and its suburbs, killing and injuring many people and displacing thousands of Yemenis¹².

It is important to note that this conflict is not the only one in Yemen, there are other conflicts between the rival forces in Yemen, this further complicates Yemen's political and security situation.

Section three: Political Rapprochement between Yemeni Islah party and Houthi movement

History of cooperation and tension between the Reform Party and the Houthi movement in Yemen has witnessed continuous transformations over the past decades, there was close cooperation between the party and movement in the face of the former regime and the political transition in Yemen, but over time, the relationship between the parties began to tension and clash¹³, some of Yemeni Islah party media supported Houthi intellectual rights and defamed and criticized former President Ali Abdullah Saleh's regime¹⁴.

From 2004 to 2010, There was close cooperation between Yemeni Islah party and Yemeni Government in the face of

¹¹ مجموعة باحثين، الحوثية في اليمن، الأطماع المذهبية في التحولات الدولية: مركز الجزيرة للدراسات، 2008

¹² حمد يوسف أحمد، أزمة اليمن... حلقة في مسلسل انكشاف الدولة الوطنية العربية، آفاق المستقبل، العدد، 27 سبتمبر، 2015 ص28

¹³ الجزيرة نت، "تخطى الإصلاح اليمني في علاقته بالحوثيين"، تاريخ الاطلاع

2023/12/15، على الرابط <https://bitly.ws/36QeA>

¹⁴ الجزيرة نت، "اليمن مسارات الحرب السابعة"، تاريخ الاطلاع 2023/12/20، على

الرابط <https://bitly.ws/36Ret>

the Houthi movement, the parties' cooperation was to form alliances and unite efforts to counter the Houthi movement. Over time, the Houthi movement became more cooperative with Yemeni Islah Party and other anti-regime alliances¹⁵.

However, the relationship between the party and the movement began to deteriorate in the following period, Disagreements and divergent interests have begun to emerge between the parties and tension has increased over many issues, including control of political and economic resources, power and ideology¹⁶.

As the conflict in Yemen continued, the relationship between the party and the movement evolved into a state of ongoing collision, Armed clashes and political tension between the two sides were part of Yemen's political landscape, While the parties continue to talk about cooperation and dialogue, Yemen's political arena has witnessed a marked convergence between Yemeni Islah party and Houthi movement in recent years, The reasons for this convergence are several important factors that have formed over time, are as follows¹⁷:

1- This convergence can be explained by the existence of a number of points common to the political agenda between the party and the Movement, despite previous differences between them, however, they share their desire for independence and social justice in Yemen, as stated in their statements and some research reports, this means that on some key issues there can be consensus and cooperation between them to achieve these common objectives.

¹⁵ الجزيرة نت، "عن جدلية السياسي والطائفي في اليمن"، تاريخ الاطلاع 2023/12/18،

على الرابط <https://bitly.ws/36QfP>

¹⁶ الجزيرة نت، لقاء "الإصلاح" و"الحوثي" موجه لمن؟، تاريخ الاطلاع 2023/12/18،

على الرابط <https://bitly.ws/36QkW>

¹⁷ Ramon Blecua, (2015), "A revolution within the revolution: The Houthi movement and new political dynamics in Yemen", Elcano Royal institute. Pp. 1-9

2- The political rapprochement between party and movement can be the result of the difficult political and economic conditions facing Yemen, In the light of the ongoing war and economic crisis, the political parties may find it necessary to cooperate and converge to address common challenges and find solutions to the problems of the Yemeni people.

Moreover, the political rapprochement between party and movement may have regional and international dimensions, External interventions may seek to strengthen cooperation between Yemen's conflicting parties in order to achieve their strategic interests.

The relationship between Yemeni Islah party and Houthi movement in Yemen is one of the most prominent political topics that attracts the attention of many, Analysing the internal and external factors that have led to the parties' political rapprochement is therefore crucial.

Internally, there can be several factors that have contributed to political convergence, among which may be similar political objectives and visions between party and movement, they may have common interests to cooperate towards, moreover, factors such as race and tribal affiliation may also have the effect of promoting such convergence.

Externally, there can be other factors contributing to the political convergence between party and movement, there may be external interventions from regional or international forces seeking to strengthen that relationship in order to achieve their political or strategic interests in the region, there may also be external interventions by other States that seek to limit one party's influence and strengthen the influence of the other.

Political rapprochement between Yemeni Islah Party and Houthi movement in Yemen has a significant impact on Yemen's political and security situation, Yemen is characterized by a

complex political history and strong political competition between different parties, However, the political rapprochement between Yemeni Islah Party and Houthi movement is a significant development in Yemen's political arena.

The importance of this convergence is focused on its impact on Yemen's political and security situation. At the political level, the convergence can enhance cooperation and dialogue between the various parties, this contributes to political stability in Yemen, and this convergence may also lead to the formation of strong political alliances and the consolidation of efforts to address important national issues.

On the security front, the political rapprochement between Yemeni Islah Party and Houthi movement could reduce conflict and security tensions in Yemen. When the various parties are able to work together and reach political agreements, this may lead to a reduction of security tensions and increased stability in the disputed areas, however, it should also be noted that the actual impact of the political rapprochement between the Reform Party and the Houthi movement may be diverse and complex.

The analysis of the future relationship between Yemeni Islah Party and Houthi movement in Yemen is an important topic worth studying in depth. Over the past years, the relationship between these two groups has witnessed significant developments, ranging from convergence, tension to even armed engagement.

From the political level there seems to be some convergence in the positions of Yemeni Islah Party and Houthi Movement on some national and regional issues, some of the party's statements may indicate its willingness to negotiate with the Houthis a peaceful solution to the Yemeni crisis. At the same time, some statements by the Houthis may express their willingness to dialogue and negotiate with other political parties in Yemen, Socially, Yemenis suffer from insecurity and instability, high rates of crime and violence, the

political rapprochement between Yemeni Islah Party and Houthi movement may exacerbate these social problems. The political escalation could increase tensions and conflicts in society, and economically Yemen was experiencing a significant deterioration in the economic situation. Where various infrastructure and economic sectors have been damaged, the political rapprochement between Yemeni Islah Party and Houthi movement may affect economic stability, investment promotion and infrastructure development, this makes it more difficult to restore the Yemeni economy and improve citizens' lives.

However, we must bear in mind that there are several factors affecting the future relationship between Yemeni Islah Party and Houthi Movement, the issue of control over resources, strategic areas and political influence remains crucial in shaping this relationship. We must also take into account external interventions and regional forces affecting Yemen's political dynamic.

Conclusion

After conducting the study and considering many information and data, we can draw several important conclusions that affect Yemen's political research and understand the political rapprochement between the Islah Party and the Houthi movement, are as follows:

1- It is clear that there is a shift in the relationship of Yemeni Islah Party and the Houthi movement from objection and conflict to rapprochement and cooperation, this may be a strategic shift aimed at strengthening the belligerents' power vis-à-vis other powers or may be due to changes in the political agenda and common interests.

2- It is noted that the political rapprochement between Yemeni Islah Party and the Houthi movement directly affects Yemen's

political dynamics, this could lead to the formation of new alliances or changes in the distribution of political forces.

3- By examining this convergence, we can understand more about the motivations and interests of the warring parties in Yemen and how they are influenced by the transformations of political and economic reality, there may be internal and external factors affecting this relationship and constituting political alliances and trends in Yemen.

After all, we must acknowledge that these conclusions may be principled and need further research and analysis to further clarify the relationship between the Yemeni Islah Party and the Houthi movement in Yemen.

Recommendations:

Research paper made the following recommendations, After the analysis of the political rapprochement between the Reform Party and the Houthi movement in Yemen, some important recommendations for the future and political development in Yemen were reached, and Political stability is vital for Yemen, and therefore the implementation of these recommendations may contribute to the strengthening of Yemen's national unity and internal peace:

1- The need for a neutral and impartial political environment, and political efforts and government institutions must be independent and impartial, to ensure the distribution of justice and equality throughout Yemen, Democracy and respect for human rights must be strengthened and the political participation of all parties encouraged.

2-Dialogue and understanding between the Yemeni Islah Party and the Houthi movement must be strengthened, there must be sustained efforts to promote trust and mutual understanding between the two sides, facilitate dialogue and negotiation to resolve

political differences and conflicts, whereby national dialogue committees can be established and bilateral meetings between political leaders strengthened to promote dialogue and understanding.

3-International efforts must be strengthened to help achieve peace and stability in Yemen, The United Nations and International Organizations must play an active role in facilitating these efforts with realistic credibility that touches the ground in the Yemeni arena.

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